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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 9351
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5435
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5541
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0431
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 4057
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 3052
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SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; March 19, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun, All TVs
Terrorist Bombing May Have Targeted Koreans Yet Again;
Blast Hits Convoy Carrying Korean Officials,
Kin of Explosion Victims in Yemen

Dong-a Ilbo
Prosecution Secures Circumstantial Evidence that Former President
Roh Moo-hyun Received 5 Billion Won from Taekwang Industrial
Chairman Park Yeon Cha

Hankook Ilbo
Public Servants' Negligence and Indolence Waste Opportunity to
Induce a Multinational Pharmaceutical Company
to Build 200 Billion Won R&D Center in ROK

Hankyoreh Shinmun
Two Military Law Officers Dismissed for Filing a Petition with
Constitutional Court against Defense Ministry's Ban
on So-called "Disturbing Books"

Segye Ilbo
Police Irregularities Increasingly Serious

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

Unification Minister Hyun In-taek, in a March 18 forum in Seoul,
said that North Korea's recent border restrictions were "damaging"
hopes for a better future in inter-Korean relations, but he ruled
out closing the Kaesong Industrial Complex in the communist state.
(JoongAng, Dong-a, Hankook, Hankyoreh, Segye, Seoul)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

North Korea has rejected U.S. food aid and asked aid groups to leave
the country by the end of this month. (Chosun, Dong-a, Hankook,
Hankyoreh, Segye, Seoul, all TVs, VoiceofPeople)

This North Korean move, coming amid escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula over the North's plan for a rocket launch, seems aimed at getting the attention of the U.S. for bilateral talks. (Chosun) North Korea might also have preferred rejecting the aid to allowing the U.S. to suspend it as one of possible sanctions after its planned rocket launch. (Dong-a, Hankook, Seoul)

North Korea's Premier Kim Yong-il and his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao held a meeting in Beijing yesterday to discuss resuming the Six-Party Talks and the North's launch of a "satellite." The two leaders also seemed to discuss a visit to China next month by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. (Hankyoreh, Segye, all TVs, Pressian)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

-North Korea

The ROK media gave wide play to North Korea's rejection of U.S. food aid and its request for international aid groups to leave the country by the end of this month.

Most of the ROK media noted that the latest North Korean move came amid escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula over the North's plan for a rocket launch, and analyzed that Pyongyang might have preferred rejecting the aid to allowing the U.S. to suspend it as one of possible sanctions after its planned rocket launch. Chosun

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Ilbo wrote in the headline: "North Korea Using All Cards to Attract U.S. Attention and Have Bilateral Talks." Dong-a Ilbo editorialized: "The food shortage in North Korea is extremely serious, though perhaps not as bad as in the 1990s, when millions are known to have starved to death. ... The North is spending astronomical amounts of money to develop nuclear weapons and conduct missile tests, with slogans such as, 'military-first politics' and 'a strong and prosperous nation.' ... It is impossible to understand the North's call for a strong and prosperous country when its people are starving to death." Hankook Ilbo's editorial stated: "If Pyongyang cares about its citizens dying of starvation, the communist state should cooperate closely with the international community to resolve the food shortage. To this end, strengthening the monitoring of food distribution is needed. This measure is also needed to draw more aid from the international community, which is getting 'tired' of providing aid to the North. Since the root cause of conflict lies in distrust, it is necessary for international aid agencies and NGOs to build trust with the North Korean authorities."

Yesterday's meeting in Beijing between North Korea's Premier Kim Yong-il and his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao received coverage. Most of the ROK media reported that the two leaders discussed resuming the Six-Party Talks and the North's planned launch of a "satellite." The media also reported that the two leaders seemed likely to discuss a visit to China next month by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

In a related development, Chosun Ilbo's Chinese affairs reporter wrote: "Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao told Secretary Clinton when she visited China last month that China and the U.S. should not only 'cross the river in a common boat' but also 'progress together hand in hand,' responding to Secretary Clinton's mention of an ancient Chinese story of warring feudal states 'crossing the river in a common boat.' If this Chinese stance holds true, it would be natural for China to join with the U.S. to impose sanctions on North Korea if the North fires a missile. However, China has thus far demonstrated an ambiguous attitude toward the North's missile issue.

Why can't Chinese President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi give North Korean leader Kim Jong-il clear and straightforward advice about his missile antics? If China wants to become a strong nation riding in a common boat with the U.S., it should not speak different words with the same mouth."

Can North Korea Feed Its Citizens without U.S. Food Aid?
(Hankook Ilbo, March 19, 2009, Page 35)

The North Korean authorities have reportedly rejected additional U.S. food aid. Although the North may have its reasons, spurning outside aid without any measures to resolve residents' starvation is irresponsible behavior. Given its serious food shortage, Pyongyang cannot afford to have its own way. If aid from the international community, including the U.S., is suspended, it is possible that a large number of people will go hungry as happened in the mid-1990s.

If Pyongyang cares about its citizens dying of starvation, the communist state should cooperate closely with the international community to resolve the food shortage. To this end, strengthening the monitoring of food distribution is needed. This measure is also needed to draw more aid from the international community, which is getting "tired" of providing aid to the North. Since the root cause of conflict lies in distrust, it is necessary for international aid agencies and NGOs to build trust with the North Korean authorities.

Playing Games While People Starve
(Dong-a Ilbo, March 19, 2009, Page 31)

North Korea is kicking out international aid organizations working

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in the North to monitor food distribution after rejecting U.S. food assistance. This act is beyond comprehension. Considering the dire food shortage in the North, Pyongyang has every reason to ask for international support but instead acts arrogantly. The expansive delusion of the North under leader Kim Jong-il is extremely abnormal, as the communist regime puts on a facade of being a strong country and conducts an offensive on the world despite its starving population.

Analysts have a wide variety of analyses on Pyongyang's intent. Some say the North's rejection is intended to win U.S. sympathy given the South Korea-U.S. military exercise Key Resolve and strong warnings against Pyongyang's purported missile launch. The North believed the Obama Administration would be more cooperative than its predecessor. Others say the North seeks to preemptively counter international sanctions for its launch or express its anger over the monitoring of food distribution. Whatever the reason, Pyongyang's move is an inhumane act of aggression depriving its people of the right to live.

The food shortage in North Korea is extremely serious, though perhaps not as bad as in the 1990s, when millions are known to have starved to death. Even a generous estimate suggests that the North can self-supply 4.2 million tons of grain this year, a far cry from its need of 5.2 million tons. In certain regions, residents get a yearly food ration barely enough for three months. Many barely survive on soup or simply starve to death. Vitit Muntarbhorn, a United Nations envoy for human rights in North Korea, said 8.7 million residents suffer from an extreme food shortage. For this reason, the United States pledged in May last year to supply 500,000 tons of food to the North over a one-year period. But Pyongyang rejected that as well.

The North is spending astronomical amounts of money to develop nuclear weapons and conduct missile tests, with slogans such as, "military-first politics" and "a strong and prosperous nation." A Korean proverb says, "Eat before touring even Mount Kumgang (in North Korea)." It is impossible to understand the North's call for a strong and prosperous country when its people are starving to death.

North Korean media recently reported that Kim Jong-il visited Chollima General Steel Company in Nampo late last year and cited the lack of heat in the cafeteria. He reportedly said after blasting senior officials, "If the cafeteria is cold, it is useless no matter

how much nutritious food workers eat." For Kim to demand heating at cafeterias while denying much-needed foreign food aid for his starving country is incredibly hypocritical and cheating the North Korean people.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

STEPHENS